

Catching the Culprits: The Horrifying Murder of Bobby Franks

Morgan Fleming
Washington School, Peoria
Teacher: Mindy Juriga and Janelle Dies

The newspaper stands were swarming with people, and the papers were selling like crazy. The headlines read “How Franks Boy Was Killed Is Told.” It was three months since the tragic event, but it was still all anyone could talk about. Everyone in Chicago wanted to know who murdered Bobby Franks. Who unraveled this horrifying crime? In 1924, all of Chicago watched in shock as the *Chicago Daily News* helped solve the case of Leopold and Loeb, one of Illinois’ biggest murder trials that dominated the front page of Chicago’s local newspapers and is still mystifying.

Ever since the case entered public awareness, it was surrounded by mass media. During that time, the *Chicago Daily News* was a popular newspaper and a competitor of the *Chicago Tribune*. But only the *Daily News* covered an especially wide variety of writing that attracted a range of readers. The *Daily News* was significantly involved in the case of Leopold and Loeb, making connections between the dead body and the Franks kidnapping before Leopold or Loeb knew their plan was slowly unraveling. Furthermore, it had significant information far ahead of other newspapers. Big events like this were crucial to the smooth operation of the paper because Chicagoans were thirsting for new information on the case, and this increased the newspaper’s profits.

The case dominated the front page of the *Daily News* for four months, featuring various articles about the case, including all the details. The paper also was interactive, incorporating quizzes for readers to compare themselves to Leopold’s extremely high intelligence level and polls where people could voice their opinions. Phrenologists made

photographic analyses of the murders, and there were pictures from the trial and of the boys in prison clothes. Horrifying headlines screamed to the readers from the stands: “How Franks Boys Was Killed Is Told!” and “Leopold’s Typewriter a Franks Clew.” The *Daily News* had a massive impact on the public’s opinion, changing Leopold’s reputation from “cold scientific monster” to a clumsy object of ridicule. Moreover, it made the boys seem more normal than the people thought, introducing the new psychological concepts “normal” and “abnormal.” No longer were they immortal masterminds, but just two irresponsible boys unfortunately guilty of a crime. Still today, people debate why the two young men committed this crime. The press interviewed Mrs. Franks while she was still in shock, and talked to Mr. Franks, who would do anything to get his son back. The *Daily News* featured a story on Leopold’s father, who was shocked at the gruesome crime his son had committed. Reporters discussed the wealth of families of the guilty boys, and how it might save their lives. Throughout, the *Daily News* provided an accurate account of the case and provided the prosecuting attorney with useful information. In the end, the paper’s message to the people of Chicago shifted from “children as victims” to “children as possible criminals.” Not only did people have to watch out for the safety of their children, but they also needed to raise their children as safe people.

Who were the two masterminds behind solving this case? James Mulroy and Alvin Goldstein of the *Chicago Daily News* were only “cub” reporters--young and inexperienced--yet were the two who saved Mr. Franks thousand of dollars and helped catch the culprits. The two hunted down information all hours of the day, rotating shifts and taking turns eating and sleeping so that one of them was always on the case. They diligently worked night and day with no help from the police or anyone else. While “real

reporters” did not have time to look under the surface, Mulroy and Goldstein picked up clues that no one else would have noticed. The young reporters divided tasks; Mulroy visited the Franks family, while Goldstein observed the corpse, and later, brought Bobby’s uncle to identify the body. Soon, Mulroy and Goldstein had made connections between the dead body found in the swamp and the mysterious kidnapping. The two also found typing samples from Leopold’s previous school work, compared it to the ransom note, and linked the writing. Because of this, Leopold and Loeb were brought in for more questioning. Soon after, the pair ran into Loeb on the streets. They gathered this important quote from him, “If I were to kill any kid, I’d pick just such a fresh little boy as that Franks kid.” After investigating, the two young reporters reported to police. Without support or encouragement, Mulroy and Goldstein helped crack the infamous case of Leopold and Loeb. In the end, their hard work rewarded them with Pulitzer Prizes and permanent professional reputations. Without them, the crime may have remained a mystery.

This murder affected the very busy city of Chicago in more ways than one might think. The Franks murder helped shape the city’s identity during a time of great change. It did not improve Chicago’s already bad reputation of crime, and since both killers were Jewish, the Jewish population of Chicago felt all eyes were on it. Then there was the involvement of Clarence Darrow, a world-renowned attorney, and the interest and attention of the media. The city’s life was very hectic at the time, and crowds swarmed around the courthouse as reporters and photographers pushed and shoved for a better view. Maybe one of the most important ways the murder affected Chicago was the way it

educated parents. It illustrated the dangers to the children of the city, and made people realize the importance of sensible child-raising to avoid further tragedies like this.

In 1924, all of Chicago watched in shock as the *Chicago Daily News* helped solve the case of Leopold and Loeb, one of Illinois's biggest murder trials. It dominated the front page of Chicago's local newspapers. Goldstein and Mulroy are legendary for helping to solve the horrifying crime and catching the culprits. Few will ever forget the hectic four months in which the crime covered the front page.

[From Paula Fass, *Marking and Remaking and Event*

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